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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DUNCAN HUNTER CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PROCUREMENT SUBMARINE FORCE STRUCTURE AND MODERNIZATION

This morning we will receive testimony from two panels consisting of witnesses from the U.S. Navy and the Congressional Research Service on the adequacy of the Navy's nuclear powered attack submarine (SSN) force structure and modernization plans for that force. The first panel's witnesses will provide the Navy's perspective from the point of view of operational commanders and the senior officers charged with determining the Navy's requirements for submarine programs and the development and procurement of those programs. The second panel will consist of a single witness from the Congressional Research Service who is a recognized expert in Navy force structure and modernization programs and who has studied extensively the issues associated with SSN force modernization.

Today the U. S. Navy operates a force of 56 SSNs, down from a Cold War era high of 99 SSNs – a reduction of 43%. The Cold War mission of this submarine force was primarily one of locating and tracking the submarines of the Soviet Union. While the Soviet Union is now gone and the submarine force of its successor states is much smaller, the Navy's SSNs have been tasked with many more missions than during the Cold War. SSNs today perform intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions, provide direct support in the protection of aircraft carrier battlegroups and other surface ships, support special operations forces, and provide a covert land attack cruise missile capability. Complicating the performance of these tasks is the proliferation of advanced submarine technologies, principally from the states of the former Soviet Union, that enable regional powers to pose a credible submarine threat to our deployed naval forces. The most dramatic example of this problem was Russia's sale of advanced "Kilo" class submarines to Iran – creating almost instantly a modern submarine threat to U.S. naval forces in that critical region where none existed before.

SSNs are the most survivable naval platform available today. When employed properly they can operate almost undetectably in even the most hostile environments for long periods of time. These vessels are valuable national assets that are likely to become more precious as the widespread availability of advanced sensor technologies, such as high-resolution commercial satellite imagery, and inexpensive cruise missiles hold surface ships increasingly at risk. In a rapidly evolving threat environment, there may come a time in the not to distant future when a submarine is the only naval vessel that can operate with complete freedom of action in response to international crises.

The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) of 1997 recommended a force level of 305 ships for the Navy, including an SSN force of 50 submarines, and recent budgets have supported that number. However, the budget request for fiscal year 2001 included additional funding that could be used to increase the SSN force structure by refueling four *Los Angeles* class submarines that were scheduled for early retirement or to refuel retiring *Ohio* class ballistic missile submarines in concert with a program to convert them to nuclear powered cruise missile submarines

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(SSGNs). While the additional funds in the budget are a step in the right direction, the amount provided is insufficient to complete both the additional SSN refuelings and the SSGN conversion program. Moreover, these programs are only short-term measures intended to address a critical situation. The long-term problem with SSN force structure can only be addressed by buying more submarines than currently planned in the Administration's budget.

In addition to procuring more SSNs, efforts must be made to ensure that these vessels incorporate the most advanced technologies available. Development and procurement of the *Virginia* class SSN will span three decades and must necessarily incorporate new technologies as many of the components and much of the software used in that program today will almost certainly be obsolete before the last unit of the class is procured. Moreover, since the Navy is operating a much smaller SSN force than it did during the Cold War it is critical that this force maintain its technological superiority over potential threats.

I believe that we are at a critical decision point with respect to the Navy's submarine force. We, both the Congress and the Administration, must commit to buying more attack submarines than the current budget envisions. Buying a single *Virginia* class submarine a year and then planning a rapid increase in submarine procurement at a time when it must compete with other critical shipbuilding programs, such as DD-21and CVN(X), will almost certainly lead to a submarine force that is too small to meet the national security need's of our country in the 21st century.

With that I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses to discuss the Navy's nuclear powered attack submarine force requirements and modernization plans:

- Rear Admiral Albert H. Konetzni, Jr., United States Navy
  Commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet

- Rear Admiral Malcolm I. Fages, United States Navy
  Director, Submarine Warfare Division (N87)
  Chief of Naval Operations

- Rear Admiral John B. Padgett, III, United States Navy
  Commander, Navy Region Northeast/
  Commander Submarine Group TWO

- Rear Admiral John P. Davis, United States Navy
  Program Executive Officer for Submarines
  Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition/Deputy Commander for Submarines

Our second panel will provide an independent analysis and critique of the Navy's submarine modernization plan and its adequacy in meeting Joint Staff requirements. The panel consists of a single witness from the Congressional Research Service who has appeared before this subcommittee before and is a widely respected expert in naval force structure and submarine issues. I am pleased to welcome our good friend:

- Mr. Ronald O'Rourke
  National Defense Specialist
  Congressional Research Service

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